
Joint Responsibility for the Establishment of a State Aid Program

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THE ENACTMENT INTO LAW of New Jersey's first state aid program¹ on December 1, 1959, climaxed more than a decade of effort by the New Jersey Library Association and other groups. Although only \$400,000 or approximately one-fourth of the amount originally requested was provided for the first years, the important fact is that the program has become a reality. It is hoped that, like Congress with the Library Services Act, the legislature will raise the level of the appropriations to or near the total needed to carry out in full the provisions of the law adopted.

With the enactment of the state aid program, all but one of the recommendations of the Commission to Study Library Services in New Jersey have been realized. The adopted recommendations included mandatory certification programs for municipalities of 10,000 population and above, increased appropriations for the Graduate Library School at Rutgers University and the Public and School Library Services Bureau (extension agency) of the State Library. The commission's recommendation still remaining to be accomplished is the erection of a permanent building to house the extension services. Surveying and studying library conditions provide a necessary basis for sound state aid laws and New Jersey gave careful consideration to this premise.

The movement for a statewide library development program actually began in New Jersey before World War II. In the late 1930's, the Regional Library Committee of the New Jersey Library Association made preliminary investigations of some of the problems confronting county and municipal libraries. This movement, however, lost mo-

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mentum during the war years and gradually came to a halt. In 1949, the Regional Library Committee again became active and subsequently was renamed the Library Development Committee.

At about the same time, a special committee was appointed by the state commissioner of education to study the professional education and training of librarians in New Jersey and to find a means to relieve the shortage of librarians. The resignation at this time of the director of the Library School of the New Jersey College for Women, the women's college of Rutgers University, and the necessity for a decision as to whether the school should be converted from a Type III undergraduate program to a graduate school lent special urgency to the situation. In 1950, this committee undertook a series of studies in the fields of school, public, college, university, and special libraries. Several out-of-state library specialists served as consultants to the committee and were largely responsible for the final editing of the questionnaires used by the committee's survey. The committee's report had two major results. It helped to persuade the state to make a special appropriation of \$50,000 to establish the Graduate School of Library Service at Rutgers University in 1953, and it produced more concrete data about library personnel than had ever been available before. By publicizing the weaknesses existing in the over-all library situation, it spurred the movement for a full-scale attack on the problem.

An important step was taken in 1951, when the New Jersey Library Association decided to push forward with its surveys of the public library situation. These surveys were conducted by six regional committees, which were, in effect, subcommittees of the Library Development Committee. Staff members from the State Library were assigned to each regional committee, and library specialists were brought in from New York State to assist in the planning stage. The surveys, which were published and publicized as they appeared in the period 1952-54, had real shock value for the state at large.

To insure that the extension services of the State Library would not be lost sight of, a special committee was appointed to survey the Public and School Library Services Bureau. The report of this survey resulted in a most important action. In 1956, the Appropriations Committee of the state legislature made a special appropriation of \$50,000 to this agency for additional staff, books, vehicles, and other equipment. This has been continued annually since that time and is now part of the regular extension services budget.

It is emphasized that these detailed and time-consuming surveys involved more than one hundred working librarians and trustees over a considerable period of time. Numerous local meetings were held to explain the purpose of the questionnaires involved and to solicit the cooperation of librarians, many of whom had never previously submitted annual reports to the State Library. The success of this method is evidenced by the fact that only one public library failed to file a return. It may be noted that in preparing the detailed questionnaires, the previous experience with the survey of library personnel in the state proved extremely valuable.

As the Library Development Committee expanded its operations over the years, it reached out and involved more and more individuals and groups outside the profession. Gradually, support was received from many important state organizations, including, among others, the State Federation of Women's Clubs, the AFL-CIO, the Congress of Parents and Teachers, the League of Women Voters, the State Grange, the New Jersey Education Association, the State League of Municipalities, the American Association of University Women, and the Associated Board of Chosen Freeholders.

Many members of the New Jersey Library Association, the faculty of the Rutgers Graduate School of Library Service and the professional staff of the State Library rendered inestimable assistance to the Library Development Committee in developing a state aid formula suitable to New Jersey. To attempt to list them all without slighting one would be difficult. It may be stated categorically that the close, continuing cooperation of the New Jersey Library Association, the Library Trustees Association of New Jersey, the Rutgers Library School and the State Library was of paramount importance in moving the entire program forward. The situation might be described as a "family" one in which the members sometimes disagreed on specific points but closed ranks and pushed forward together when major issues were involved.

A 1954 decision which was to have far reaching consequences was to seek the establishment of a joint gubernatorial-legislative commission to study and report on the entire problem. It was believed that, although the studies conducted by the profession itself had produced worth-while factual evidence to support the libraries' case, they might be regarded as "prejudiced" data. It was recognized that to appoint a commission would delay the entire program for at least two years and would involve the further risk that the commission might not

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report favorably on the need for state aid and other benefits. It was concluded, however, that the "facts" of the library situation would speak for themselves and the decision was made to proceed. Accordingly, a joint resolution² was introduced on May 10, 1954, to "create a commission to study the administration of library services in the counties and municipalities of New Jersey and prescribing its powers and duties." The choice of a sponsor of this particular measure proved to be a most fortunate one. Senator T. J. Hillery of Morris County agreed to introduce the resolution, which was unanimously approved by the legislature and signed by the Governor. Subsequently, Senator Hillery served as a member of the study commission and was the principal sponsor of the state aid bill, which was first introduced in 1957, and finally, in amended form, became law in 1959.

The commission included three senators, three assemblymen and five citizens appointed by the Governor. At the organization meeting of the commission on November 17, 1954, Governor R. B. Meyner urged the commission "to make every effort to produce a study that would serve as a basis for a carefully conceived plan leading to the improvement of library services throughout the State." The commission held three hearings at which a number of individuals and organizations urged support of a state grants-in-aid program to assist public libraries.³ The commission completed its work in 1955 and made its official report to the Governor and the legislature in January 1956. The report, entitled *Better Libraries for New Jersey*, after pointing out that free public libraries, as a vital part of our whole plan for public education, deserve active state support, listed the following findings and recommendations:

Present Condition of Libraries in New Jersey

Definite progress has been made in the libraries of New Jersey. There are, however, a number of obvious weaknesses:

1. More than 200,000 people in New Jersey lack free public library service of any kind.
2. More than one-half of the people in New Jersey have available only inadequate library service supported from public funds at a level lower than \$1.50 per capita annually, the standard established by the American Library Association, in 1948 for limited or minimum service.
3. There are not enough books and other library materials available to the people of New Jersey.

4. Most of our present library units are too small to render adequate service.
5. There is a wide variation in the level of additional support required to bring the present library units up to a minimum level of service.
6. Many libraries in New Jersey are staffed by persons with inadequate professional training and experience.
7. Facilities for training in professional librarianship are now available but low salaries handicap recruitment.
8. Many of our library buildings are outmoded, too small for present populations and inefficient in light of present-day standards.

Recommendations

The present conditions of the free public libraries of New Jersey call for joint vigorous action by the municipalities, counties and the State aimed at achieving minimum library services in all areas of the State through (1) a closely integrated program for the improvement of library services for all our people, (2) increased financial assistance for our county and local libraries, (3) a strengthened State Library extension service, (4) improved standards for professional librarians, and (5) adequate support for the training of professional librarians in our State university.

The importance of having these recommendations included within the covers of an official state report cannot be overemphasized. Since publication, the report has received wide use in providing basic information to local boards of trustees and governing bodies as well as to librarians and other interested individuals.

Space does not permit a detailed description of the state aid program recommended in the report. The formula called for per capita aid to all municipalities supporting public libraries and larger amounts to those meeting certain standards designed to encourage greater local support, larger areas of service and consolidation or federation of libraries. Still higher amounts were provided for those municipalities least able to support municipal services. To receive the higher aid, a municipality would have to expend annually a "local fair share" measured in terms of municipal equalized property valuations for library purposes, have an annual budget of \$50,000 or be a member of a federation with a budget of this amount, or be a member of a county library system.

The method or methods by which the study program and legislative campaign were financed in New Jersey may be of interest. The

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New Jersey Library Association provided the largest portion of the \$4,000 to \$5,000 that were expended during the period from 1950-59. Annual appropriations were made to the Library Development Committee, and conference receipts from book auctions and exhibitors' fees were dedicated to the purpose of state aid. These monies were used for travel, publications, and for honorariums to various consultants and specialists who were employed. Another source of revenue were the individual contributions solicited by Association members. The Library Trustees Association of New Jersey made two generous gifts, and the State Library contributed services in the form of staff time, supplies, postage, etc. The cost of printing the report, *Better Libraries*, was borne by the State Library, also. Two pamphlets designed to help sell the state aid program, *Of Concern to Everyone Who Reads* and *Do Not Have and Cannot Borrow*, prepared by a professional public relations specialist, were paid for by the New Jersey Library Association. An effective film strip produced by the Library Development Committee, was also paid for by the Association.

The studies made and the recommendations submitted by the legislative commission would have had little effect if they had not been accompanied by an effective legislative campaign. If the task of the Library Development Committee was to produce a good product, i.e., a plan for improving public libraries in New Jersey, the job of the Legislation Committee of the state association was to sell it to the legislature and Governor. A paramount reason for the success of the New Jersey program was the continuing coordination that existed between the two committees.

Immediately after the legislative committee submitted its official report in January 1956, a bill was introduced in the New Jersey Legislature to provide for state grants-in-aid as recommended in the report. It took more than three years after it was first introduced to have the bill passed by both houses and signed into law by Governor Meyner. The detailed history of the legislative campaign would require more space and time to tell than is available. Readers who would like to have a blow-by-blow case history of a similarly successful legislative campaign are referred to R. H. Rohlf's article in the June 1957 issue of *Minnesota Libraries*. The problems encountered by the Minnesota librarians, the techniques they used and the unflagging energy and zeal with which they went about their legislative task are strongly reminiscent of the New Jersey experience, and, for that matter, of the A.L.A. experience at national level in connection with the Library

Services Act. These examples suggest strongly that given a good program and effective leadership, a successful legislative program is within the reach and capacity of every state library association.

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